

# Action Strategy: Commercial Office Support

Downtown office vacancies are a result of two basic problems: Downtown offices have greater occupancy costs than their suburban competitors, and the Downtown market lacks the easy access and increased amenities offered by outlying locations. The fundamental focus of the office incentive program must be to use every tool available to attract and retain a vibrant mix of employers in the Downtown Columbus office core.

## Principle: Support the Commercial Office Market with Program Incentives and Other Amenities

Throughout the City's history, Downtown Columbus has served as the core of the region's employment market. In recent years however, this trend has changed. To some extent, the geographic diversification of the office market should be viewed as a good thing. The City as a whole benefits from being able to provide potential employers with a wide variety of office locations, and it is natural for different types of industries to cluster around important links such as airports and transportation hubs.

However, the Downtown core has been losing its share of the office market to suburban competition at a significant rate. U.S. Census and business industry data show that in the key Finance, Insurance and Real Estate (FIRE) industry sector for example, Downtown has seen a 10% decrease in employment from 1990-2000, while the suburban area has seen a 50% increase. In each of the four largest employment sectors, Downtown currently represents 50% or less of the region's total employment.

In terms of supply, the suburban market has been growing at a far quicker rate than Downtown. During the economic boom period from 1990-2000, there was 4.6 times more new construction in the suburbs than Downtown, and total net absorption was 14 times higher than Downtown. In the past year, both the Downtown and suburban markets have experienced increases in vacancy. For Class A space Downtown, this rate, according to a recent CB Richard Ellis market survey, has risen to more than 28% as of the end of 2001.

The importance of Downtown as a vital and growing employment sector cannot be over emphasized. The 140,000 jobs currently located Downtown provide countless benefits in terms of income tax, property tax, and sales tax revenues that support the entire City.

In addition, the energy created by this level of employment drives the need for support services located Downtown. If the Downtown office base continues to erode, it will undercut every other effort being made toward Downtown revitalization.

### Element One: Jobs Tax Incentives

There are two basic facets to the tax credit strategy for office tenants in Downtown buildings. The most basic facet is to continue aggressively marketing the existing Ohio Jobs Creation Tax Credit. This is a program that allows any company that brings employees in from out of Ohio to apply for a State credit on corporate franchise taxes based on the total payroll of the new employees. The tax credit applies to any net new jobs located within the State. The City of Columbus also extends a credit to those businesses that locate new jobs to the State within the City.

While these existing programs have been very helpful to companies across the State, it does not do anything to differentiate between companies that locate in suburban versus Downtown locations. In order to bring companies Downtown, the City will also create a program that provides a special Downtown benefit. The Columbus City Office Incentive Program will provide an incentive payment equal to one half of the amount of the City's personal income tax collected in the prior year for each new job located Downtown. This new program will be more comprehensive in that any company moving jobs into Downtown from anyplace outside of the City of Columbus would be eligible. Even jobs relocated from other areas in Ohio will qualify.

This program will create an important financial incentive for a business to locate or expand Downtown rather than in one of the outlying office markets. For the first time, the City will be extending an important financial benefit to expand the Downtown business community. Cincinnati has used a similar program as part

*"It's essential that we continue finding ways to bring in more businesses, more families and more tourism dollars to the Downtown we're proud to call home."*

**Matt Habash,**  
Columbus  
City Council

*“We have a strong Franklin County delegation that understands the value of having a strong central City.”*

**Rep. Joyce Beatty,**  
Minority Whip,  
Ohio House

of a package used to attract the Cinergy Corporation, bringing more than 300 new jobs Downtown. Locally, Dublin has used similar incentives as well. Columbus will now be on equal footing with other cities in Ohio.

In addition to new and expanding businesses, this second facet of the incentive strategy will be extended to existing businesses as a tool for retaining and expanding key office tenants. Without a concerted effort at retention, Columbus is in jeopardy of losing even more office tenants. This will become a particular danger as suburban vacancy rates continue to rise, providing more options for relocation. If incentives are not extended to these tenants more of them will leave and Columbus will be left without its most significant source of revenue and energy Downtown.

### **Element Two: Creating Downtown Amenities**

There are two parts to the gap in office occupancy costs between Downtown and outlying locations. The package of tax incentives will address the increased cost of occupancy. At the same time, an improved variety of Downtown amenities will make Downtown a more attractive place for offices, thereby increasing the value of being Downtown.

Some of these amenities already exist in great supply. For example, Downtown locations offer proximity to clients, other businesses, and City and State government agencies that cannot be matched.

The creation of more convenient parking facilities, a beautiful Riverfront Park, a more pedestrian friendly Downtown environment, increased retail and entertainment amenities, and new and vibrant urban neighborhoods will all serve to increase the value of Downtown office spaces. Every element of this Strategic Business Plan will increase the overall amenity package, and provide the Downtown office market with a competitive advantage over other areas. As the various pieces come together, Downtown will regain its prominence as the premier office market in Central Ohio.

An existing body of research supports the notion that amenities bolster existing markets while attracting new tenants and residents alike. For example, studies conducted as part of the Columbus Regional Economic Strategy for the 21st Century support the idea that a dense, connected, and highly amenitized urban environment can serve as an important tool for the recruitment of energetic new businesses into older Downtowns. Researchers found that creative and multi-faceted urban environments attract both start-up firms, and growing and creative divisions of larger firms.

This research highlights creative services firms (such as design, software, media, and public relations firms) as one specific employment sector that would likely be attracted by a mixed-use urban environment that provided cultural, recreational and retail opportunities. This creative segment currently represents 34,000 employees, and has been growing at a rate of approximately five percent per year. When added to existing strengths in FIRE, public employees, and other services firms, the Downtown employment sector could be dramatically revived by the City's Bicentennial. This research shows that the development of a comprehensive amenity package for Downtown Columbus will not only benefit the City's existing residents but it will also attract and benefit new ones.

### **Next Steps**

The decline in the Downtown office market will not allow much time for the development of long-term responses. Important groundwork has begun – namely, government, business and community leaders have recognized the issues in Downtown and maintain, with a fair sense of urgency, that the development of amenities and other supports for Downtown are necessary for the future of the City. While the development of a comprehensive amenity package is a longer-term strategy, several important steps can and should be taken immediately:

- Secure final City Council and other necessary approvals to implement the full package of incentives
- Proceed with the on-going design of, and improvements to, parks, streets, and other amenities without delay

# Action Strategy: Neighborhood Development

There are two initial focus areas in this effort to reestablish connections throughout Downtown. The area adjacent to the intersection of Broad and High Streets has remained active as the core of Downtown's office corridor. However, immediately to the north and south of that area, the level of activity is reduced. Downtown revitalization will only be successful when the core is reconnected to all of the active areas and districts.

## Principle: Facilitate the Creation of Mixed-Use Districts and In-fill Opportunities in Underutilized Areas of Downtown

Successful Downtown environments depend on vibrant, lively, and active streets and built environments. A driver or passenger moving through Downtown should always have the feeling that there is an exciting reason to get out onto the sidewalk and move around. A pedestrian should always feel a tension between stopping and looking at shops or buildings that are right there and a desire to see what is down the block or around the corner.

This environment cannot exist where there are large stretches of underutilized and underdeveloped land that interrupt the urban experience. While people are usually willing to ignore small stretches of vacant lots or surface parking, large collections of these uses quickly deter all but the most undesirable of street level activity.

While Downtown and its adjacent neighborhoods have many successful and vibrant districts – the Short North, the Arena District, the Brewery District, and others – there are still areas of the urban fabric with significant holes. Downtown redevelopment must focus on filling these breaks in street life and activity with mixed-use neighborhoods that bring people, shops, and other activity back to the sidewalk level.

### Element One: The RiverSouth Neighborhood

The section of Downtown Columbus between City Center Mall and County complex is a concrete example of this problem. This stretch of Downtown, which will be designated as RiverSouth, is now used mostly as a series of surface parking lots, which create a foreboding environment for anyone who is not in a car.

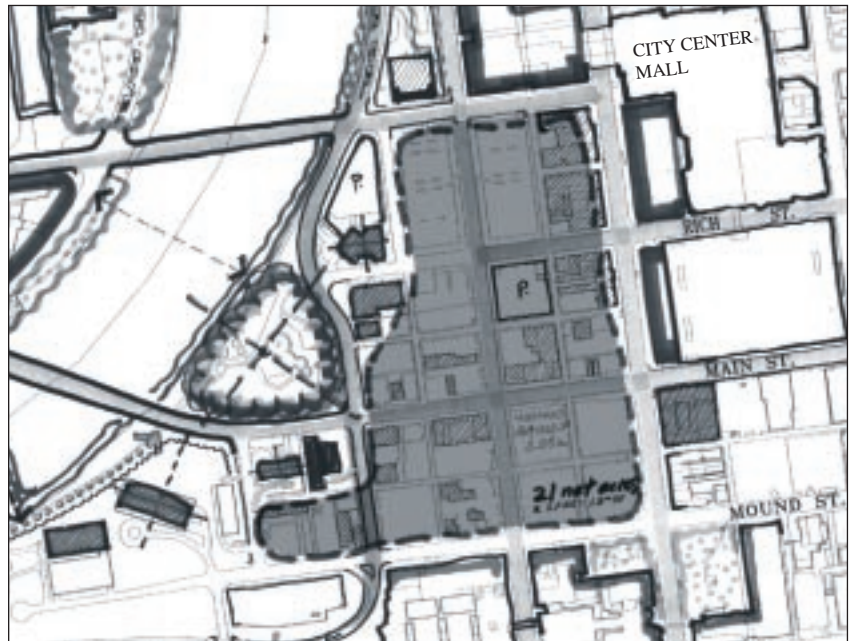
More importantly, the sudden disappearance of street life in the area around City Center Mall contributes to the recent decline in activity in

the mall, as the stores are completely removed from any direct activity to the south. Indeed, the future development of the blocks in RiverSouth is directly tied to the future health of City Center, the Lazarus Department Store, and the surrounding retail blocks. While the City has no direct control over these existing stores, it can have a profound positive impact on their future.

This area provides tremendous opportunity for change. With approximately 20 acres of potentially developable land that can accommodate a range of uses, and diversity of scale, RiverSouth could at once be developed for retail, entertainment, residential and institutional users. To initiate the exploration process for the highest and best use for the area, the City has joined together with the major property owners in the area – representatives of Lazarus, City Center Mall, and the various Schottenstein interests – to form a working group that will focus on the future of the development on these blocks.

*"Downtown is a huge economic engine for our region. It is the first impression we give outsiders about who we are and what we stand for."*

**Dewey R. Stokes,**  
Franklin County  
Commissioner



*The plan calls for the development of a new, mixed-use neighborhood, called RiverSouth, near City Center Mall that would include housing, office and retail.*

*“The growth of the entire Greater Columbus region is directly linked to our Downtown. A vibrant Downtown is critical to successfully attracting new companies with high wage, high skill jobs to Greater Columbus.”*

**Sally Jackson,**  
Greater Columbus  
Chamber of  
Commerce

The core of the strategy will be to prepare the surface parking lots and other developable land in RiverSouth for redevelopment through a Master Developer. This will allow for the coordination of phasing and a mix of uses over time, ensuring a development that is sensitive to overall market forces and community needs. These parcels could easily hold several hundred units of housing, along with local service retail and entertainment uses. This will create a critical mass of residents to provide activity, vitality and energy to the stagnant area just south of the Downtown core.

Clearly, this neighborhood has tremendous potential. It can and should be developed to accommodate a range and density of uses that together will anchor existing development south of State Street, filling a gap in the fabric of Downtown Columbus. Rather than an intermittent pattern of activity, the City will enjoy a truly urban environment in this area of Downtown.

### **Element Two: The Gay Street Corridor**

A second key corridor for investment lies north of Broad Street along Gay Street from the river to the east. Unlike the south side of Downtown, the historic buildings and street pattern in this neighborhood have been largely retained. When this existing infrastructure is restored and adaptively reused, the Gay Street corridor will serve as an effective link between the Downtown core and the activity of the Arena District and the Short North.

On its western edge, Gay Street will be reconnected to Marconi Boulevard behind City Hall, and will serve as a key connection to the northern end of the Riverfront Park. Further to the east, the existing buildings along Gay Street are envisioned as renovated with retail at the street level and a mix of small-scale offices and residential uses on the upper floors.

There are two primary tools for aiding the reuse of buildings in the Gay Street corridor as residential conversions. First, these new residential units will be eligible for the tax abatements described in the housing section of this plan.

Second, residential conversion will be aided by a review of the various regulatory issues surrounding the adaptive reuse of existing historic structures.

Gay Street provides a unique opportunity for the creation of a residential street consisting of new and renovated property. The existing architectural character of the street, including properties such as the Buckeye Building and others, is one of the few examples of this type of architecture that remains Downtown. Additionally, Gay Street can be a vital connection to the riverfront, allowing for continuity between existing Downtown districts. Finally, the emergence of street life and residential development on Gay Street will serve as an important spur for the revitalization of the retail corridor of High Street. High Street will be restored as the key link between Downtown and the emerging 24-hour community in the Arena District and the Short North.

### **Next Steps**

The potential for the creation of a cohesive urban fabric in Downtown Columbus is too great an opportunity to permit unnecessary delay. The RiverSouth and Gay Street neighborhoods will transform areas of Columbus from a somewhat disjointed urban experience into a true multilayered, multifaceted, mixed-use, attractive and exciting Downtown that blends seamlessly with its surrounding districts. The process of forging these important connections can proceed with several key steps:

- Formalize the working group of primary RiverSouth stakeholders to begin the collaborative process of outlining the framework for a master-developer controlled redevelopment strategy
- Analyze regulatory issues to facilitate the adaptive reuse of historic structures
- Identify a potential demonstration project that will advance the civic purpose and street life objectives for similar spaces in the area



# Action Strategy: Riverfront and Open Space

The transformation of the riverfront began in the early 20th century from an industrial corridor to civic use. This project intends to further those efforts by building on the area's strengths with the introduction of new elements and the refurbishment and rethinking of existing spaces and structures to provide for a vastly improved riverfront experience. Among other things, the project will attempt to adjust scale, improve access, and provide shade and benches to make the area more inviting.

The proposed Riverfront Park has two overall goals. The first is to transform the Scioto riverfront from an underutilized public space into an engaging recreational and civic amenity for Downtown and the region. Second, the park will connect to the adjacent open spaces, such as Spring Long, Battelle and Bicentennial Parks, and foster better linkages between the riverfront and Downtown. These "green corridors" are envisioned to include substantial tree plantings and other landscape treatments along Gay Street, Broad Street and Town Street, with two additional corridors to be determined. This will enhance the pedestrian experience and create better connections between the Scioto and the State House.

## Principle: Develop the Riverfront as the Anchor Amenity for all of Downtown

The creation of a signature asset and the development of a sense of place in Downtown has emerged as a priority for Columbus' new Downtown. This process has begun with the development of the Spring Long Park along the riverfront. Further transformation of the Scioto riverfront will re-energize the Civic Center Drive area, and provide an important urban amenity for all of Downtown, complementing residential and office support strategies in this plan.

The development of public open space as a civic amenity to draw visitors and residents has been used as a revitalization tool throughout urban history. In Pittsburgh, the Cultural Trust developed a park along the underutilized Allegheny riverfront as part of a similar effort, complementing residential development and cultural improvement projects. In New York City, the Battery Park City Authority created a new neighborhood with street grids and open spaces to create interest in, and bring traffic to, an area before constructing many residential and office buildings. Longer ago, Frederick Law Olmsted noted that developing Central Park would inspire the construction of stately mansions along New York City's Fifth Avenue, which also proved true.

Clearly, there are many precedents that the City can draw upon where the creation of a public realm has been used as a driver for other economic development and other urban improvements.

## Element One: Riverfront Promenade

The first phase of work includes the central unifying component of the project – the upper promenade. The promenade is envisioned as a 35-foot wide walkway along the eastern edge of the Scioto connecting Bicentennial Park to the south and Battelle Park to the north. The promenade will be lined with an allée of London Plane trees to provide a high, shaded canopy; benches will be added for comfort and convenience. The existing carved limestone balustrade, created as part of the river wall project in the 1920s, will also be restored. As part of this project Civic Center Drive will also be reduced to three lanes, to provide room for the promenade, and lessen actual and perceived separations between the river and Downtown. Finally, the ends of the promenade will taper in long ramps to connect the upper Civic Center Drive level to the lower, river level park.

*"Completion of the West Columbus floodwall will return a vital, secure and beautiful space along the banks of the Scioto River to the public."*

**Deborah Pryce,**  
U.S. Representative



*The new Riverfront Park would feature a walking promenade along the narrowed Civic Center Drive.*

*“Downtown Columbus is unquestionably the heart of the larger metro area. It is critically important to strengthen our urban center by making the appropriate capital investments which will benefit all citizens of Central Ohio.”*

**Jon Peterson,**  
Assistant Majority  
Whip, Ohio 80th  
House District

### **Element Two: Battelle and Bicentennial Parks**

The project’s second phase will focus on creating connections between the promenade and the adjacent open spaces – Battelle and Bicentennial Parks – and redesigning aspects of those parks. Bicentennial Park will be regraded to connect with the promenade. In addition, the plan calls for creating an extensive grass seating area for concerts and other open-air events. The renovations will also seek to improve sight lines from the street into the park, making it safer. The orientation of the lawn will offer improved views of the river, and will be better positioned with respect to the sun.

The proposed improvements to Battelle Park also include creating connections between it and the promenade. The redesign will focus on establishing sight lines down Gay Street, through the park and to the river. As part of overall Downtown improvements, the closed portions of Gay Street will be reopened; and the street will be converted to two-way traffic. Street trees will also be added.

### **Element Three: Lower Level Park**

The next phase of the project will focus on a lower level park on the portion of the waterfront between the Broad and Town Street bridges. This part of the project complements the formality and grandeur of the promenade with a native riparian landscape along with water features.

The lower level includes a circulation loop, allowing pedestrians to experience the park system without retracing their steps. The area will be anchored by groves of native floodplain trees near each bridge, with a more open space in the center dominated by wetland grasses and wildflowers. A new weir at the outer edge of the lower level park creates a large pool of water separate from the river; small islands with associated plantings will be located within the water pool. The weir will prevent the accumulation of river-borne debris within the lower level park and will also form a small waterfall at its junction with the river.

Each component of the lower level – the walkway, the islands, the plantings and the weir – are designed to withstand periodic flooding.

The final component of the lower level park includes a water feature that engages the river and its river wall. This feature will serve as a water source for the lower level pool, and provide a fine backdrop to the park. The current proposal calls for water falling from the top of the river wall, increasing in tiers as it falls to the river, and creating a subtle veneer that will capture and reflect light. The curve of the river will afford views of the water curtain from the promenade and several spots along the river’s edge.

This water feature, created in conjunction with local artists, offers a unique opportunity to blend art and architecture with public improvement projects, a practice that should be considered in future development programs as a tool for enhancing the Downtown environment. The riverfront also offers an exceptional location for either temporary or permanent art installations, a concept that is consistent with earlier planning recommendations and should be further explored.

### **Next Steps**

The development of a riverfront park system is a considerable undertaking for Columbus, one that will take several years and considerable funding to develop. Once completed, the park will offer an incredible civic amenity, drawing residents and visitors alike, and providing the City with a true Downtown destination worthy of Ohio’s capital city.

The key steps necessary to initiate this important project include:

- Begin schematic design development for the entire park system
- Initiate the proposed traffic improvements and other modifications necessary to narrow Civic Center Drive
- Identify capital funds for the construction of the riverfront promenade
- Direct the Columbus Downtown Development Corporation to develop an operating and maintenance budget and plan for the proposed park

# Action Strategy: Traffic, Parking and Transportation

## Traffic Improvements

Pedestrian and vehicular transportation improvements are critical to any Downtown revitalization and are particularly important to Columbus. The development of strategically located and affordable structured parking facilities, as well as public transportation enhancements, are also part of a comprehensive strategy to make Downtown more inviting to residents and visitors alike.

### **Element One: Narrow the Width of Civic Center Drive**

The current width of Civic Center Drive – four lanes plus parking, the high speed of traffic on the lightly used lanes, and the visitor confusion on the one-way streets, all detract from the riverfront's potential as a signature park. Reducing the width of Civic Center Drive to three lanes will serve as an important support to the park, by adding space for the promenade and making a safer and friendlier pedestrian environment along the riverfront.

### **Element Two: Restore Two-Way Traffic on Civic Center Drive, Front Street, Gay Street and State Street**

Restoring two-way traffic flow to Civic Center Drive, along with Marconi Boulevard, Hickory Street and Second Street, is important to the riverfront park. In these instances, two-way traffic will slow vehicles without necessarily creating congestion. Two-way traffic patterns will also allow drivers more expansive views of the riverfront, adding to its civic value just as comparable exposure to building frontage from two-way streets adds to Downtown's commercial value.

Front Street is the northbound "half" of the Civic Center Drive/Front Street one-way pair, and its conversion to two-way traffic flow should complement the conversion of Civic Center Drive. Two-way operation should be restored between Livingston Avenue, just to the south of I-70 – meeting the existing two-way segment to the south – and at the north end, at Hickory Street – meeting the two-way segment to the north.

In the first phase, two-way traffic should also be restored to the one-block segment of State Street between Front Street and High Street, making its traffic flow consistent with the rest of State Street. The apparent reasons for this one-way operation, truck loading, are no longer a factor.

### **Element Three: Open Gay Street between Civic Center Drive and Front Street**

The value of a signature park along the riverfront is realized only if there are attractive walking and driving routes to it. Gay Street is the most valuable east/west route to the riverfront, as it not only aligns with Battelle Park, an important part of the open space system, but also serves, along its length to the east, all major Downtown north/south streets.

The important traffic features of a reopened Gay Street include two-way traffic service with a single lane in each direction, on-street parking, wide sidewalks, and elimination of the haphazard parking areas near Civic Center Drive. A related measure is the conversion to two-way traffic along the remainder of Gay Street, eastward to its termination at Cleveland Avenue. The newly created block of Gay Street between Civic Center Drive and Front Street should carry the full streetscape treatment, including trees, sidewalk and street lighting.

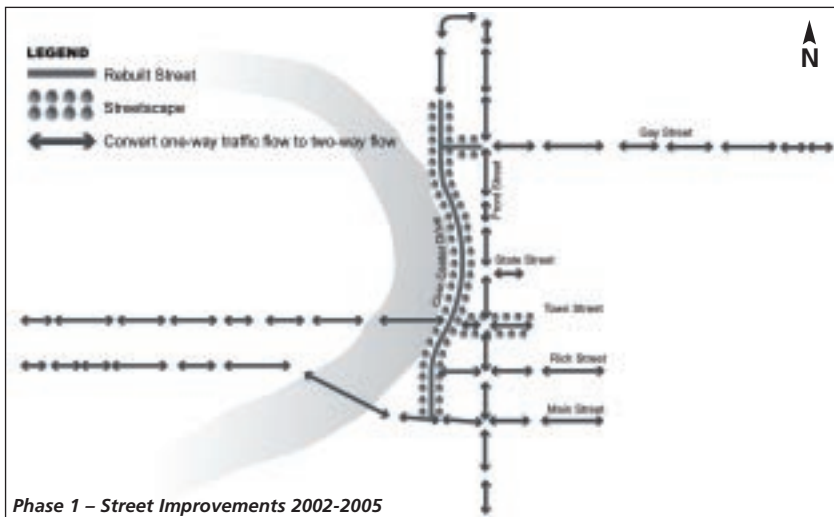
*"A lack of convenient, affordable parking places Downtown Columbus at a significant competitive disadvantage. Until we intervene and eliminate or mitigate this disadvantage, we should expect office occupancy and housing development to languish."*

**John Rosenberger,**  
Capitol South  
Community Urban  
Redevelopment  
Corporation

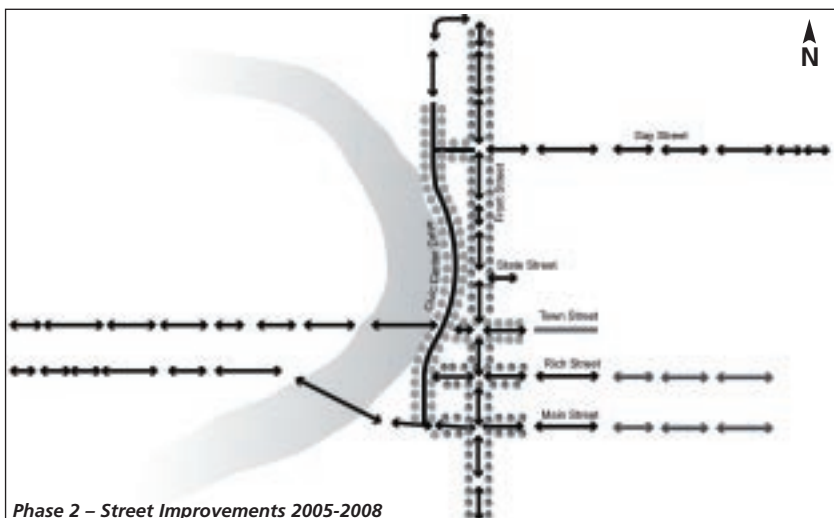


*Gay Street would be rebuilt and converted to two-way from Front Street down to the river, providing better access to the new Riverfront Park.*

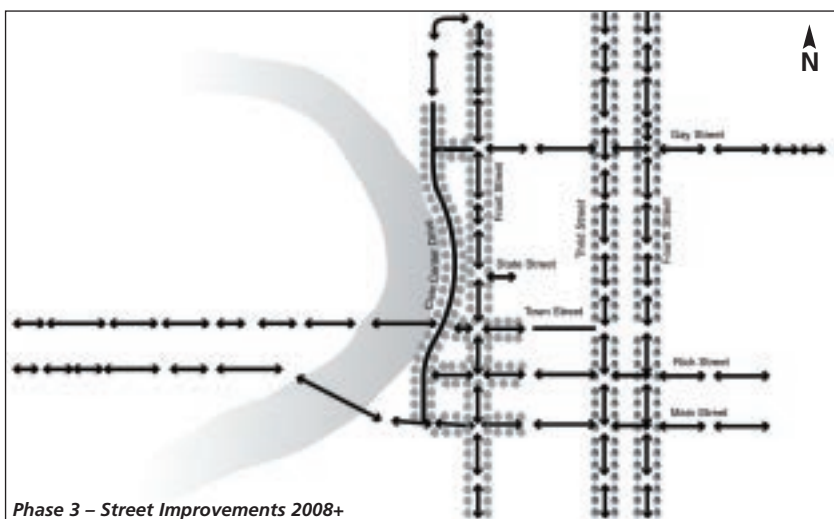




The plan calls for narrowing of Civic Center Drive, reconnecting Gay Street to the river, and beginning the conversion of Gay, Front, State, Town, Rich, and Main Streets to two-way traffic. Civic Center Drive is landscaped.



The plan calls for rebuilding Town Street and extending Gay, Rich and Main Streets to two-way traffic. Front Street is landscaped.



The plan calls for converting Third and Fourth Streets to two-way traffic and adding landscaping.

#### Element Four: Develop the Town Street “Streetscape”

Town Street is an important east/west connector to a riverfront park because of its continuity over the Town Street Bridge, as a route to COSI, and to the east, a direct route to City Center Mall. As a first-phase transportation improvement, this street should be fully streetscaped. Major components of this treatment include sidewalks, curb “buildouts” to reduce the apparent width of the street and to shield parking, street lighting and street trees. The treatment should extend between Civic Center Drive and High Street, thereby providing an attractive pedestrian way from the mall to the riverfront.

#### Element Five: Restore Two-Way Traffic to Portions of Town Street and Main Street

Restoring two-way traffic on Main Street, from its interchange with the Interstate to Third Street, along with its westbound counterpart on Town Street, and on Rich Street from Civic Center Drive to Third Street will improve the accessibility to the waterfront, to institutions along the waterfront, like COSI, and set the proper framework for the redevelopment of the seven block area bounded by Civic Center Drive, High Street, Town Street and Mound Street.

#### Principle: Enhance the Accessibility of Downtown Streets for Vehicles and Pedestrians

The first phase of proposed traffic improvements are key to a critical element of the Downtown strategic plan: reclaiming the riverfront for a signature park, and getting there – walking or driving – from Downtown’s centers of activity. Toward this end, emphasis is placed on converting Columbus’ one-way streets to two-way traffic, and narrowing Civic Center Drive to allow for the development of a riverfront promenade. Other proposed improvements include opening Gay Street to improve riverfront access and view corridors, as well as adding streetscape amenities on Town Street.



The rationale for one-way streets stems from a time when cities felt the need to “compete” with the suburbs, by providing quick, convenient vehicular access into and out of downtowns. Planners and downtown advocates nationwide now see the advantages of balancing the need for efficient vehicular circulation with the need to make the Downtown environment friendlier for pedestrians, visitors and residents, who are there to enjoy Downtown’s assets rather than speed back to their homes at the end of the day.

Streetscape improvements also provide for a more pedestrian-friendly environment Downtown. Potential streetscape treatments include: widening the sidewalks to create a “promenade” and allow for a double allée of trees, seating areas, and a redesign of existing bus stops and shelters. Other elements, such as pavers, kiosks and signage can be developed simultaneously to ensure a welcoming environment. Sidewalk widening has been used in many downtown revitalization initiatives, including 17th Street in Denver, State Street in Chicago, 3rd Street in Santa Monica and others.

The plan proposes these enhancements in a number of areas. Other projects, such as the proposed Broad Street median, are also being considered.

### Next Steps

These improvements represent a suggested first phase – one that will provide a solid foundation for subsequent traffic improvements. Additional work, such as the conversion of Third and Fourth Streets to two-way traffic, continuing with streetscape improvements, and expanding two-way street conversions throughout the Downtown core will continue to add value to Downtown streets by making them more accessible and attractive.

### Principle: Construct Additional Parking Garages to Support New and Existing Downtown Development Projects

Parking is an issue with profound implications on a number of related issues that are being addressed by this plan. Currently, parking costs as much as \$150 per month per space. This presents an important increased cost of doing business in a Downtown location. Additionally, lack of available spaces in parts of Downtown gives offices and businesses in those areas a locational disadvantage. Finally, a large percentage of the existing parking supply is found on surface parking lots. These lots represent an inefficient use of land that further hinders new development and creates pockets of inactivity that further hinder the economic success and urban environment of everything around them.

In the most basic sense, parking should be a tool for development. Parking provides access to jobs, homes, shopping, culture, entertainment and other activities. Construction of new parking garages Downtown will focus on ways to use this resource to further the goals of the overall Downtown Plan.

### Element One: Develop First Phase of Parking

The first facet of the parking strategy will be to address existing shortages of available parking. Needs assessments conducted by Capitol South have identified one quadrant northeast of Broad and High Streets and one quadrant northwest of Broad and High Streets as potential new locations for structured parking facilities. Of course, the market for parking facilities may well shift, and locations for new structured parking will be geared toward providing the best response to market demand.

The first zone to be addressed is likely to be northeast of Broad and High and will focus on serving the newer office buildings in this area, which suffer from a severe lack of convenient parking. Several of these building owners have indicated a willingness to commit immediately to long-term rental of any new spaces.

*“For this City to be a great 21st century City, it has to have a great 21st century Downtown.”*

**Carl Kohrt,  
Battelle**

*“We have an administration that has made Downtown development a priority. We have business leaders who are on board to pledge their collective support.”*

**Dan Schmidt**  
JDS Companies

To the northwest of Broad and High, a potential new structure would be geared more toward general municipal parking use. The market area is comprised of many smaller companies that would be less likely to commit to long-term agreements for numerous spaces. However, it is also possible that a shift in local market forces could create a strategic opportunity elsewhere Downtown that would change parking priorities.

In both cases, Capitol South, an entity with a proven track record in this area, will administer the development of these structures. Additionally, the development of new garages will provide an ideal opportunity for the implementation of a consolidated Downtown “parking pass” with a single payment mechanism for the City’s 5,000 metered spaces, for Capitol South’s 7,000 spaces, and for participating privately owned facilities.

### **Element Two: Serve Growing Market Opportunities**

The second element of the parking strategy will focus on the longer term opportunity to use structured parking facilities as a way to serve the growth of new residential and mixed-use neighborhoods south of Broad Street to the east and west of High Street. This will be particularly important as a new neighborhood is developed on the surface parking lots of the RiverSouth district. New structured lots will easily offset the loss of the existing spaces.

### **Next Steps**

The need for new structured parking facilities is pressing, and developing new parking is a key component of this Downtown Plan. Assuming there are no significant shifts in market demand, existing parking demand to the north and east of Broad and High will be the first target area, with an additional structure to follow within two years. A total of three or four new structures will be developed within the next 10 years.

- Identify location and develop first garage
- Determine the technical and market feasibility of the implementation of the Downtown “parking pass”
- Monitor market development northwest of Broad and High as a potential second garage location

## Principle: Support Public Transit Improvements Downtown

Because Downtown is exceptionally large and destinations are widely scattered, public transit can provide the necessary linkages to move people quickly and conveniently within Downtown, and out to adjacent residential neighborhoods.

Twenty percent of Downtown commuters rely on public transportation, according to a study by the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC). These people arrive Downtown by bus, and need some form of transportation within Downtown for trips during the day. Add to this a growing number of conventioners and visitors – and hopefully soon, residents – and the need for a low cost, convenient transportation solution becomes apparent.

Downtown light rail may provide such a solution. Clean, electrically-powered light rail cars with state-of-the-art, no-wait service will help alleviate bus congestion along High Street and assist with traffic management as streets are converted from one to two way. A demonstration project could substantiate the viability of this important investment. For example, the initial phase could run from The Ohio State University campus to the Brewery District. Smaller buses could circulate from east to west, bringing more passengers to the rail line.

Such a project will position transit to serve the need of getting around Downtown, rather than focus on quick entrances and exits. It would also provide streetscape and other amenities as rail stops would be landscaped and well lit. Federal funds might also support infrastructure improvements along High Street.

Since a demonstration project or a fully developed light rail line may take some time to develop and implement, another interim option may be a shuttle service between key Downtown destinations. These shuttles have been successful in many U.S. cities.

## Proposed Light Rail

The Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA) is currently developing a \$27 million multi-modal transit terminal and administrative offices north of Nationwide Boulevard, spanning the active CSX freight rail tracks between Front and High Streets. The terminal will serve as a hub for a proposed Downtown rail line, as well as smaller bus circulators, larger buses, taxis, and potentially, intercity rail.

Groundbreaking for the project is anticipated in 2004, with completion scheduled for 2005. Designed to support the vision of a pedestrian-friendly, easy-to-navigate Downtown, the plans also call for pedestrian walkways and bicycle connections to Arena District area facilities.

Plans for a light rail line are also moving forward. In early 2002 the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) gave a “recommended rating” to a COTA/MORPC proposal that included the development of a 13 mile rail line, the first of eight for Franklin County. Built Downtown, the first leg of this new rail line could be an important element of the revitalization effort, and demonstrate the promise of light rail. The FTA rating is a significant move forward, allowing preliminary engineering to begin and clearing the way for federal capital funding in the future. The precise timetable will depend on when the COTA Board of Trustees can develop a successful ballot issue for public matching funds.

## Next Steps

Neither the City nor the Columbus Downtown Development Corporation have jurisdiction over the funding or implementation of transit improvements Downtown. However, the benefits of the proposed projects are clear. The City is supportive of these efforts and intends to work with COTA and other parties to ensure project implementation and to coordinate, to the greatest extent practicable, other Downtown development projects so as not to interfere with proposed transportation improvements.

*“Our recent surveys show that rail is a very important component of expanding and enhancing our Downtown.”*

**Ron Barnes,**  
COTA

# Implementation

*“This plan is very focused on implementation — not only did we analyze the issues and determine ways to address them, we developed action steps to solve them.”*

**Alex Shumate,**  
Downtown Advisory  
Task Force, Chair

## Revitalizing Downtown

Implementation must remain a focal point in order to meet the challenges of Downtown renewal. A process has been developed that has, in some ways, redefined the interactions among government, business and civic leaders. Common goals have also been identified. The culmination of this remarkable effort must now be geared toward collective action.

Realizing change in Downtown Columbus will require commitment, capital and capacity. Commitment is evidenced by the extraordinary amounts of time, talent and resources that so many have contributed to this endeavor. While this show of strength was integral to igniting the process, the ongoing commitment of public and private partners in this effort is necessary to ensure progress.

Capital, is of course, more complex. The City of Columbus has allocated funds to begin several of the multi-phased Downtown projects described in this plan. Additional public investment has also been pledged for Downtown projects over the next decade. It is the goal of this plan to leverage limited public capital with private investments to the greatest extent possible.

Discrete development projects can, with some effort, be successfully executed once capital is secured. However, to effectuate a Downtown revitalization initiative of considerable scale, ongoing capacity becomes critical. The public development function in Columbus is not transitory. Rather, it requires a specialized development entity with a tightly focused agenda that can act on behalf of the City to help achieve Downtown renewal goals. Creating a new development corporation is critical to moving this plan forward.

## Capital Program

The City of Columbus has allocated \$10 million in funds for first year projects. This money is targeted toward a mix of projects that will have an immediate impact while laying the foundation for future success. These projects will include beginning the construction of a new structured parking facility, the creation of a pedestrian promenade on Civic Center Drive along with the finalization of the design for the Riverfront Park, and initial funding for new housing and cultural development projects.

The City has also pledged \$100 million for Downtown projects between 2002 and the City's Bicentennial in 2012. Given the current environment of fiscal austerity, this long-term commitment will be funded through a prudent strategy that focuses on preparing for economic opportunity. These funds will come from a combination of City capital dollars and City-issued bonds in cases where clear new revenue streams can be identified to repay the bonds without imperiling the City's financial health.



## Columbus Downtown Development Corporation

### Mission

The overall mission of the new Columbus Downtown Development Corporation (CDDC) is to facilitate priority development projects and programs Downtown. This entity will be responsible for implementing those ideas put forth in this Strategic Business Plan; modifying the plan as necessary in response to changes in circumstance, need, and policy leadership over time; and broadening and maintaining support for the plan. In short, the CDDC is charged with developing, managing, creating, and implementing those projects and programs that will result in a re-energized, revitalized Downtown. Moreover, the CDDC will forge public-private partnerships so that scarce public dollars will leverage private sector investments.

Adding another entity in a City with departments and organizations with similar aims may seem unnecessary. However, tough challenges require comprehensive, focused solutions. The CDDC is designed to complement the efforts of the Downtown Development Office and Capitol South, providing additional capacity that will help the City realize its vision for Downtown.

The CDDC, a private, not-for-profit corporation operating as “Agent” for the City, can bring to bear private sector expertise and practices while serving the public good. In addition, it has a very specific focus and set of goals, while other organizations have a wider customer base to serve. The CDDC’s staff will also have different backgrounds and skill sets from the current professional staffs that serve the City and related agencies. Finally, the CDDC’s Board of Directors is comprised of Columbus’ most accomplished business and community leaders, many of whom are both new to the City, as well as to public involvement. Having the commitment, experience, resources and muscle of the business community is what differentiates this effort from prior plans, and what will contribute to its success.

### Governance and Structure

The CDDC is a private, 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation, governed by a 15-member Board of Directors. The Mayor of Columbus appoints

seven members, with confirmation of Columbus City Council. The Franklin County Board of Commissioners appoints one member; the remainder are appointed at the board’s discretion and may vary in number. The Chair of the initial Board is Dr. E. Linn Draper, President and Chief Executive Officer of AEP, who will serve until December 31, 2004. Future Chairs will serve for two-year terms, and Directors will serve staggered two- and three-year terms.

A President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), reporting to the Board of Directors, is responsible for leading the corporation’s programmatic and real estate development efforts, in addition to overseeing daily projects and activities. A national search is currently underway for that professional with the vision and experience necessary to effectively utilize the resources of the corporation for the benefit of the City. It is anticipated that the CEO will take office in the fall. In the interest of maintaining momentum, the Board may seek interim leadership for the CDDC.

Additional CDDC employees will include a project manager and administrative support. A complete staffing plan will be developed once the CEO is in place and operations are underway. The CDDC will share space in the Downtown Development Resource Center, currently occupied by Capitol South, the Capitol Crossroads SID and the Downtown Development Office. The CDDC’s efforts will complement the work of existing Downtown organizations.

### Function

The CDDC will implement Downtown development and related improvement projects. Specifically, its portfolio will include many of the projects presented in earlier sections of the report: launching and staffing the proposed Housing Equity and Investment Fund; implementing the riverfront and open space plan; facilitating private development in RiverSouth, Downtown’s new neighborhood; overseeing and managing parking, traffic and transportation improvements; and managing additional development projects as necessary.

*“The Columbus Foundation is making a leadership commitment to the CDDC because our Downtown is crucial to the economic vitality, image, and quality of life of our community as a whole. The time to act, and to act with vision, vigor, and a heightened sense of urgency, is now.”*

**Douglas F. Kridler,**  
The Columbus  
Foundation

*“Our Downtown can emerge stronger than ever, reclaiming its place as a sparkling center of commerce and entertainment, shining brightly among American cities of the 21st century.”*

**Michael B. Coleman,**  
Mayor, City  
of Columbus

## Housing Equity and Investment Fund

### Overview

The package of tax abatements and other incentives described in this plan will create new opportunities for development and rehabilitation of housing units in Downtown Columbus. In many cases, these incentives will be sufficient to bridge the existing gap between the cost and value of new housing. However, in cases where the gap is larger than average, an investment-based strategy will be used to supplement the incentive package. This will be particularly important in locations adjacent to the core of Downtown, where asking prices for land are highest.

The Housing Equity and Investment Fund (HEIF) will be a subsidiary corporation within the CDDC. The fund will focus on building a portfolio of investments in Downtown residential and mixed-use projects. In particular, the fund will use its investments to target ways to be the last piece of financing for a project that is close to resolution. As such, these investments could take the form of a short-term “mezzanine” loan or a longer-term equity position depending on the specifics on the project. In any case, the fund will seek to invest its money at a lower or longer-term return than other financing. The fund will not be making grants, but will instead be comprised of investors who are willing to be patient in seeking their returns, and who are interested in making investments for the specific purpose of creating a better environment in Downtown Columbus.

### Process

The fund will seek investors from Columbus’ businesses and institutions. The initial goal is for the fund to be capitalized with \$10 million, and to achieve long-term sustainability through its own investment returns. While the fund will be housed within the CDDC, the fund will have a separate board of advisors comprised of investors in the fund. In order to allow for flexibility and speed in investment decisions, the fund’s board will have the ability to approve investments independently from the CDDC board.

The fund’s investment manager will work directly with individual developers to determine the specifics of any potential development deal. The investment manager will make decisions on potential investments based on the following investment criteria:

- Is the potential project within the core Downtown investment area?
- Does the project substantially contribute to Downtown neighborhood creation goals established in this plan?
- Does the developer have the capacity to execute the development being planned?
- Has the developer explored and utilized an array of other financing opportunities?
- Does the project present a reasonable likelihood of providing a return to the fund?

### Initial Investment Targets

The initial investment targets for the fund will be new residential and mixed-use projects within the RiverSouth and Gay Street redevelopment zones as described within the plan. Projects within these zones will be evaluated based on the criteria established above, along with specific facets of the proposed development.

The only place in Ohio to see professional NHL hockey is Downtown at the Nationwide Arena.

Downtown is anchored by three historic, restored theaters — the Ohio, Palace and Southern.

Downtown is the region's arts and entertainment center.

Over five million visitors attend cultural events and festivals Downtown every year.



